

The Dance of the Courtier:  
Politics and Performance in Elizabethan and Jacobean England  
  
Research Thesis

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It is Christmas at London's Inner Temple, or law complex, in 1561, four years into Elizabeth I's reign. One of the court's rising stars, Robert Dudley, has been given the special honor of presiding over the festivities as the Christmas Prince, Pallaphilos. An auspicious title since Elizabeth's role in these festivities was Queen Pallas, a variation of the Greek goddess Athena. The comparison to Athena invokes wisdom and virginity, the characteristics commonly attributed to Elizabeth. Dudley's title of Pallaphilos can be translated as "drawn to" or "lover of" Pallas. Even the naming of these particular roles expresses Dudley's admiration of Queen Elizabeth. Much weighs upon these Christmas festivities for the future of the ambitious Dudley. A bright promise of political power and wealth stands on his horizon, should he please the Queen. Following dinner, the dancing begins. Dudley is on the dance floor, resplendent in his white costume, which is draped in the colors of Pallas: silver, gold, and purple. Surrounded by his twenty-four "valiant knights" and great court ladies, the dancing commences and these lively revelries continue on late into the night, which eventually includes spectators.<sup>1</sup>

One of these dancers goes by the name of Christopher Hatton, a man who caught Elizabeth's eye that night through his enchanting dancing, and was afterwards welcomed into the folds of the court. Sir Robert Naunton, a court competitor contemptuously stated, "He came to Court by the galliard...of the Inns of Court in a masque; and for his activity and person, which was tall and proportionable, taken into the Queen's favour."<sup>2</sup> In such a competitive environment where many avenues to power were explored, courtiers, the men who held official positions in a royal court, balked at and resented how others managed to catch notice with such a seemingly frivolous skill. While the court observes him performing this sprightly dance, enraptured by his charming looks, mastery of the intricate footwork, and graceful execution of leaps and kicks,

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<sup>1</sup> Nichols, John. "The progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth" (New York: AMS Press) 131-141.

<sup>2</sup> Brissenden, Alan. *Shakespeare and The Dance*. (MacMillan Press Ltd: London, 1981) 5.

Elizabeth watches closely. One missed step, and the outcome of the dance could change completely, his reputation and allure tarnished, quickly dismissed by the Queen. Evidently Christopher Hatton performed well, as he was thenceforth cemented into the Elizabethan courts, exercising a strong influence. His power and wealth expanded as he became a gentleman of the privy chamber, sat for parliament, and was appointed Lord Chancellor in 1587. He even became one of the largest patrons of Sir Francis Drake's momentous overseas voyage of 1577.<sup>3</sup> In fact, Drake's ship was titled the "golden hind" in reference to Hatton's coat of arms.

The dance floor was a stage where men vied against one another to attract the attention of Elizabeth, not unlike the inner circles of the court during daily functions such as privy meetings and audiences with the monarch where courtiers dueled in rhetoric and extravagant clothing. Perfecting the steps of a dance was important and some courtiers took notice of the great effect that such skills could have on their fortunes in the courts of Elizabeth I and James I. For those who recognized the two-fold nature of dancing and the routine practice of courtly arts, a budding career could be procured. The performance of the galliard in many ways reflected the relationship unfolding between monarch and subject. The dance of the courtier was a dance riddled with complications that could change the fortunes of men, spelling out either their downfall or the glorious ascension to be envied and enamored favorite of the monarch with the world at his fingertips.

This paper will study the expression of courtly arts by the courtiers of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I of England in an attempt to recognize the importance that was placed on these seemingly frivolous activities in the rise to power of the court favorite. The courtiers in

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<sup>3</sup> Wallace T. MacCaffrey, 'Hatton, Sir Christopher (c.1540–1591)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/12605>, accessed 20 Jan 2013]

Elizabethan and Jacobean England used their vast knowledge of the courtly arts such as dancing, stage performance, poetry, athletics, and attire to gain favor from their sovereign and develop their individual power. Of course, the arts were not the only avenue that a courtier might utilize to become the favorite. There were other characteristics that were held in high esteem in the courts such as wealth, political acumen, and military prowess. The arts though, were an essential part of functioning within the courts and their significance in politics should not be underestimated. By recognizing the inextricable importance of the arts to high politics, one can view the courts of Elizabethan and Jacobean England in an entirely different light. Previously, scholars have discussed the arts as a pathway to power, but never before has it been studied in depth and such heavy emphasis placed on the arts. My studies assert that the arts were an integral part of court politics.

Elizabethan and Jacobean England (1558-1625) was ruled successively by two monarchs who both faced the challenge of controlling a country destabilized by religious factional issues between Protestants and Catholics and nationality concerns among the English, Irish, and Scottish, in particular tensions and rebellions over the Scottish James taking the English throne. Instability of the throne was an ongoing problem, as the legitimacy of the rulers was brought into question by disputing factions and foreign enemies plotted invasion. These rulers faced the onslaught of all these insecurities and utilized the courtiers around them to secure and solidify their control over royal power. Elizabeth I and James I secured alliances with the courtiers to gain support financially, politically, militarily, and emotionally for the throne of England. Likewise, the courtiers took advantage of royal need to capture prominent positions in court and develop a powerful reputation and wealth.

In the battle of court politics, a three-way relationship of power was formed in Elizabethan and Jacobean England. First, courtiers were often able to utilize the arts to develop a close relationship with their king/queen and exert political power. Second, expert performance of the arts also helped courtiers to create a powerful image to intimidate other courtiers in the highly competitive world of court power where appearances were everything. Third, on the top of this pyramid were the monarchs themselves who manipulated the courtly arts system to manifest and enhance their power. The prodigious displays of affection that the courtiers frequently performed in competition with each other to create a propitious relationship with the king/queen only contributed more to the sovereign's powerful image. The dance of the courtier was a difficult performance that in some ways the monarch invented and controlled to their own advantage.

Elizabeth encountered many threats to her reign including religious and political factions that were resentful of her policies, her origins, and her gender—and she needed to manipulate the support of the men around her in court to maintain control. Born the daughter of King Henry VIII's second wife, Anne Boleyn and cast under the shadow of Anne's trial and execution a mere three years later, Elizabeth was considered a bastard for much of her childhood. Despite this bastardy, she benefited from a comfortable upbringing and an upper-class education.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth used her intensive education coupled with her famed hauteur and wit to counter the popular belief that women were too feeble and inferior to rule on the all-powerful throne of England. This belief in women's inability was further enhanced in John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, published in 1558. In it, he states, "And

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<sup>4</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'Elizabeth I (1533–1603)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2012 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/8636>, accessed 13 Feb 2013]

such be al women, compared vnto man in bearing of authoritie. For their sight in ciuile regiment, is but blindnes: their strength, weaknes: their counsel, foolishhenes: and iudgement, phrenesie, if it be rightlie considered”.<sup>5</sup> No woman who had previously ruled on the throne of England was known for stability or longevity of reign. Queen Maltida barely grasped onto the throne of England for a few months in 1141 before she was removed by another contender.<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth’s radically Catholic predecessor Mary Tudor (1553-1558) oversaw intensive persecution,<sup>7</sup> earning her the popular culture moniker “Bloody Mary.” Lady Jane Grey only managed to cling onto the English throne for a mere nine days in 1553. Elizabeth also faced the threat of foreign invasion from international enemies such as Spain, a threat that indeed became reality in 1588 with the war against the Spanish Armada. Within England many dangers abounded to the throne including the Northern Rebellion led by the Earl of Northumberland in 1569.

James was placed on the throne of Scotland in his infancy due to the scandal caused by the remarriage and subsequent abdication of his mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. As he grew into adulthood and his role as King of Scotland, he faced the fact that he would very possibly inherit the English throne from the Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. Upon his ascension to this throne in 1603, he faced a large slew of problems including public distrust of his Scottish heritage, a crippling national debt, continued religious factional conflicts, the rising tension between king and parliament, and the problems that arose from sitting on the thrones of two countries: England and Scotland. In England, James confronted an unstable throne in a fractured world, where a strong base of support was necessary for advancement. In the same situation as their monarchs, English

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<sup>5</sup> Knox, John. *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, Project Gutenberg, December 11, 2011 ([http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9660/9660-h/9660-h.htm#first\\_blast](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9660/9660-h/9660-h.htm#first_blast), accessed 20 January 2013)

<sup>6</sup> Marjorie Chibnall, ‘Matilda (1102–1167)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/18338>, accessed 13 Feb 2013]

<sup>7</sup> Ann Weikel, ‘Mary I (1516–1558)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/18245>, accessed 13 Feb 2013]

courtiers, investigated possibilities to accumulate wealth and security for themselves in these tumultuous times.

Courtiers and their culture that came to dominate English royal politics during Elizabethan and Jacobean eras were a prominent feature of high politics and culture through much of Europe at the time. The Renaissance began its rapid spread in Italy where some of the greatest thinkers in history initiated a new lifestyle and way of thinking: particularly humanism, an emphasis on the present life. A revival occurred, or, as the word renaissance indicates, a “rebirth” of the Classics, a complete transformation of art and life. The Italian courts became filled with new inventive art and philosophy along with renewed interest in courtly love and adoration. These Italian courts became the pinnacle of cultured society that other nations began to admire and emulate. Baldassare Castiglione immortalized the qualities of these courts in *The Book of the Courtier* in 1528. The Renaissance with its focus on courtiers and culture influenced the European continent and British Isles, rejuvenating court life and fundamentally changing interactions, especially for the role of a courtier. Elizabeth’s court fully adopted these changes becoming a high-cultured court of its time. In 1561, towards the beginning of her reign, *The Book of The Courtier* was printed in English, serving as a guidebook of sorts for courtly behavior. Under James’s reign, amazing works of literature in the form of plays written by playwrights such as Ben Jonson were produced. Even today, they are considered by literary scholars to be well-written spectacles.

In the renaissance courts of Elizabeth I and James I, the arts played a prominent role in daily life. To be respected or to play a role in the courtly rituals, it was essential for courtiers to possess an expansive knowledge of the courtly arts including dancing, performing, poetry, jousting, and wardrobe. Essentially, one had to look the part and play the part. Those who

excelled often came into favor with Elizabeth and James. To even be considered by their sovereign, the courtiers first had to catch their attention and this was frequently achieved through the courtly arts. As Castiglione stated, “thus it happens that we usually judge with love or hate. You see then how important this first impression is, and how he ought to strive to make a good one at the outset, who thinks to hold the rank and name of good Courtier.”<sup>8</sup>

Courtiers were considered the finest figures in the land next to the monarch and this perfection included the cultural beliefs of the time that placed emphasis on the arts and on highly polished manners and aesthetics. The courts were filled with ferocious adversaries equally matched in ambition, drawn into cutthroat battles of prose. Military glories were not as highly regarded in the courts of Elizabeth and James as they were in other courts. Due to the deeply personal relationships that these two monarch favored, they opposed the distance and rift that would be created by military missions. Moreover, Elizabeth thought of violence as impetuous and foolish, not a valuable quality in a true renaissance man, only necessary in war. She abolished dueling in 1527. The refinement of oneself, one’s gift with the pen, sharpness of tongue, or lightness of foot was of the utmost importance.<sup>9</sup> A courtier needed to dance beautifully for their monarch, enchanting him/her with their personal beauty and agility of the mind and body.

The position of the “favorite” of a monarch is an expression used to describe the courtier to whom a monarch showed the most preference and indulgence. While a favorite was not an official job title within the functioning court, becoming a favorite many times resulted in gaining well-paying court positions such as the Master of the Horse. This favor held a multi-faceted nature including emotional, financial, and political advantages. Favorites received lavish gifts

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<sup>8</sup> Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of The Courtier*. (Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1903) Accessed online: [http://archive.org/stream/bookofcourtier00castuoft/bookofcourtier00castuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/bookofcourtier00castuoft/bookofcourtier00castuoft_djvu.txt). Book 1, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Brigden, Susan. *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (Viking: New York, 2000) Pg. 317



and titles from their sovereign while they also enjoyed a significant amount of influence over the country's politics. The court was an arena where politics and social frivolities were deeply intertwined, the political underpinnings and tensions fiercely whispered beneath the carefree façade of a courtier. The favorites were able to utilize their close relationship with their sovereign to offer their advice on a wide range of political and family issues. In the case of the Duke of Buckingham, for instance, he often served as a mediator in many issues which arose between James and his immediate family. Becoming the favorite of a monarch lent significant prestige to an individual and their family name as well as the promise of an extremely wealthy and powerful life, and this coveted position was sought by all courtiers. The position of the sovereign's favorite courtier was also a dangerous one where a fall from grace could utterly ruin the individual, sometimes even ending their very life as is the case of Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex. The political shuffling, this dance of the courtier, was an extremely complex game fraught with unimaginable riches or grave consequences that only veritable masters were able to dominate, and even fewer were able to maintain.

The court favorites, always handsome men, developed relationships with Elizabeth and James not unlike the relationships between lovers. As an unmarried female, Elizabeth was given to flirtations with gentlemen and James I, despite the fact that he was married to Anne of Denmark, is largely considered to have been homosexual. A knight in James's court, John Oglander, stated that James "loved young men, his favorites, better than women, loving them beyond the love of men to women. I never saw any fond husband make so much or so great dalliance over his beautiful spouse as I have seen King James over his favorites."<sup>10</sup> Given the sexualities of these two rulers, it seems as if only men arose to court favorites in Elizabethan and

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<sup>10</sup> Oglander, John. *A Royalist's Notebook: The Commonplace Book of Sir John Oglander*. Ed. Francis Bamford, 196.

Jacobean England. The romantic game — including expressions of adoration, jealousy, verbal sparring, and secret conversations and jokes — are indicative of deeply passionate and personal relationships. Indeed, the “pet names” granted to many of their favorites highlight their intimate relations. James Stuart affectionately referred to his favorite, George Villiers, as “Steenie.” The nickname is a play on the name of the angelic St. Stephen meaning that Villiers had the face of an angel. Meanwhile, Elizabeth nicknamed Robert Dudley her “eyes” or her “sweet Robin” and Christopher Hatton her “mouton”, or sheep. Sir Walter Raleigh was nicknamed her “water”. One of her famed suitors Henry, the Duke of Alencon was affectionately called her “frog” after he gifted her with a frog shaped earring. A strong note of feverous devotion is detected in these relationships with composition of flattering poetry, passionate private letters, lavish gifts, and extreme declarations of devotion. To soothe the monarch’s ego was a necessary skill, extolling their wisdom, strength, beauty, and power while battling the tempestuous emotions of these great, yet vulnerable figures. In particular, Elizabeth inherited her father’s famed Tudor temper, slipping into a fuming rage at the slightest temptation. These monarchs were capable of taking their favorites to the most extreme heights of passion and devotion as well as adapting a frigid composure with those favorites who had alienated them. This ice cold demeanor is famously recorded in James’s letters to the likes of the Duke of Buckingham. The extent of these amorous relationships is unknown, but regardless, the relationships between sovereign and favorite undoubtedly held romantic inclinations. It was a necessity for the court favorite to excite, interest, and placate their more powerful partner if they wished to retain their prestigious position.

The focus of this paper is on the male courtiers, yet women were certainly present within the courts of Elizabeth and James. They were able to exercise a more indirect influence, their

direct power stifled by the sexual preference and personalities of their sovereigns. Women worked to champion their male relatives to courtier positions. George Villiers' mother sought to provide him with a thorough courtier's education and seems to have sought political openings for him through her remarriage. Her ambitious machinations to introduce her son to the court were her way of seeking power for her family. In addition, a powerful status for women, particularly in the courts of Elizabeth, was to be a lady-in-waiting to the queen. Similar to the courtier's game, proximity to power was key. In becoming a lady-in-waiting, a woman brought prestige to her family's name while placing herself near the queen's most private moments and conversations. Katherine Ashley served as Elizabeth's governess all throughout her childhood. Elizabeth affectionately named her "Kat" and said later in life that she [Kat] took "great labour and pain in bringing of me up in learning and honesty."<sup>11</sup> Upon Elizabeth's ascension to the throne, Kat was made principal Lady of the Bedchamber and thenceforth enjoyed a position of great influence. She served as an advisor and confidante to Elizabeth while also working as a liaison between courtiers and the queen. It was said that she "had such influence with the queen that she seemed, as it were, patroness of all England."<sup>12</sup> Her death in 1565 was devastating for Elizabeth who is thought to have said "Anne Boleyn gave me life, but Kat Ashley gave me love." Women were certainly present in the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts, but they exercised their influence in an indirect manner and rarely enjoyed the extensive liberty and power that male courtiers achieved.

The source work for this paper draws from a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources. Most commonly referred to are the works by John Nichols: *The Progresses and Public*

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<sup>11</sup> Tracy, Stephanie. "The Life and Death of Kat Ashley" Aug 18, 2012. Accessed online: <http://thetudorenthusiast.weebly.com/1/post/2012/07/the-life-and-death-of-kat-ashley.html>

<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Merton, 'Astley, Katherine (d. 1565)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/68016>, accessed 26 March 2013]

*Processions of Queen Elizabeth I* and *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James I*. Printed in the 1800s, these books compile primary sources of the time including pamphlets, journal entries, and other sources into a narrative of the two reigns. Other primary sources include speeches made by Elizabeth and James, books written in the time, and personal correspondence between the monarchs and courtiers. I also heavily relied on secondary sources written by leading scholars in the field including, but not limited to, David Bergeron, Janet Dickinson, and Susan Bridgen.

## ~Performance~

Performing roles both on and off of the stage was a skill that all courtiers who wished to develop a political career cultivated. Performing in or patronizing a theatre production on a stage was a grandiose method of showing the investment and time that a courtier dedicated to their sovereign. Additionally, these performances illustrated a courtier's intelligence and impeccable attention to detail while building up the monarch's powerful image to a large audience. A sensational performance held the possibility to shed light on a courtier and his potential as a favorite. Off the stage, in every day conversation with the ruler, a courtier was still challenged to keep their powerful partner on their toes while competing with other courtiers. Launching ongoing and artful dialogue and, as always, flattering the king/queen was expected even on this less public stage. Life in the court of Elizabethan and Jacobean England was a constant performance; every venue was a stage where a courtier had to perform to the best of their ability.

In the courts of Elizabethan England, which were largely based on the chivalrous principles set forth by the Italian courts and highlighted in Castiglione's *The Book of The*

*Courtier*, flattery through speech and performance was a common form of expression. Many courtiers indeed chose to sponsor theatrical performances surrounding holidays, royal progresses<sup>13</sup>, and major life events meant to thrill and flatter their sovereign. Robert Dudley staged such performances for Elizabeth on several occasions to curry favor. He established a close relationship with Elizabeth very early on in life. Born to a noble family, Robert was part of an exclusive group of children who were playmates and classmates with the young Prince Edward. Elizabeth was included in this group and it was here that she and Dudley formed a friendship, further strengthened by the mutual mistreatment and imprisonment they both faced under the reign of Mary I. Upon Elizabeth's ascension to the throne, Robert Dudley was in the unique position of a very close friend and confidant to the Queen, perched on the edge of grand success.

The Christmas revelries of 1561 are an incredible example of the imagery and symbolism that a courtier could display in a performance to flatter the sovereign. Dudley drew upon the commonly used theatrical theme of Greek mythology to portray himself as the lover of Pallas, Elizabeth's role. Her role of Pallas Athene drew a parallel between Elizabeth and the Greek goddess Athena. It was a flattering comparison as Athena was the patron goddess of wisdom, intelligent warfare, and the arts. Athena was also a virgin, a fashioned image of Elizabeth. In 1559 at the beginning of her reign Elizabeth addressed parliament saying that "in the end this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a Queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin".<sup>14</sup> For a concept that became increasingly important to Elizabeth,

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<sup>13</sup> In a progress, a monarch went on a tour of their country and lands. Noblemen were selected to host the monarch and their retinue at their homes along the journey. Often, progresses occurred in the summer when plague or disease would break out.

<sup>14</sup> Perry, Maria. *The Word of a Prince: A Life of Elizabeth I From Contemporary Documents* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999) 99-100.

such an image in the Christmas performance struck a chord. This elaborate performance at the Inns of Court must have caught Elizabeth's attention, flattering her person while portraying Dudley as an enamored and devoted servant of the Queen. It also painted Dudley as having the potential to defend her from opposing noble factions, a prominent issue of the time.<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth, who was a fan of performance, gifted Dudley with a valuable gold chain during the revelries and bestowed her blessing upon his message. In the new-year following the Christmas revelries of 1561, Robert Dudley became a member of the privy-council, the body which advised the reigning monarch.<sup>16</sup>

In 1575, Robert Dudley, who had become the Earl of Leicester in 1564, again overwhelmed Elizabeth with magnificent entertainments at his estate of Kenilworth. Upon Elizabeth's arrival, she was greeted in a most ostentatious manner with trumpeters blasting, a pageant featuring the lady of the lake and her nymphs "from the midst of the pool, whear upon a moovable island, bright blazing with torches, she floting to land, met her Majesty with a well-penned meter."<sup>17</sup> She maintained that the lake "most allweyz in the hands of the Earls of Leyceter; how shee had kept this Lake sins King Arthur'z dayz."<sup>18</sup> This scene maintained the historical association between the Leicester name and King Arthur. The Leicester lands were linked to King Arthur, a cult that the Tudor Dynasty had carefully linked to their name. Elizabeth's entrance procession continued over the main bridge where she was given a series of gifts which all were a representation of the Greek Gods including Sylvanus, Pomona, Ceres,

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<sup>15</sup> Daye, Anne. 'Youthful Revels, Masks, and Courtly Sights': *an introductory study of the revels within the Stuart masque*, Historical Dance Volume 3, Number 4. Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, 1996. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Adams, 'Dudley, Robert, earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/8160>, accessed 3 Dec 2012]

<sup>17</sup> Nichols, John. *The progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (New York: AMS Press) 431.

<sup>18</sup> Nichols, John. *The progresses* (New York: AMS Press) 431.

Bacchus, Neptunus, Mars, and Phoebus.<sup>19</sup> The choice of gods was significant as they all represented aspects of Elizabeth's kingdom including the sea, agriculture, war, fowl, and music. These gifts that were handed to her symbolized her power over all the entities, an auspicious sign. Throughout Elizabeth's visit, she encountered many representations of Greek mythology. As a result of the Renaissance, classics, including Greek mythology, were studied, translated to English, and infused into the culture of Western Europe, which often resulted in the presence of the Gods in performances. At one point, the Queen encountered Triton who told her that the Lady of the Lake "could never be delivered but by the presence of a better maid than herself".<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth's grand presence served to remove the forces surrounding the lady of the lake and she was freed. Elizabeth was thus portrayed as a better and fairer woman than the powerful and enchanting Lady of the Lake. These occurrences placed Elizabeth on a superior level above mortals and on an equal level with the Gods whom she encountered. She was not speaking with simple humans, she was conversing with gods and goddesses associated with an other-worldly entity. On a hunting expedition in the forests of Kenilworth, Elizabeth ran into the nymph Echo, who conversed with a savage and praised the legitimacy and righteousness of Elizabeth's reign stating that "here, amid this wilderness, your glorie so doth raunge. The windes resound your worth, the rockes record your name...these fields pronounce your fame."<sup>21</sup>

The duo also illustrated Leicester as the heir of Arthur's castle and a perfect match for his "descendant", Elizabeth. Her grandfather, King Henry VII (1457-1509) struggled to attach legitimacy to his throne following victory in the War of the Roses over contesting factions such as the Yorkists. To alleviate the disputing tensions, he drew from the strong imagery of King

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<sup>19</sup> Nichols, John. *The progresses* (New York: AMS Press) 430-433.

<sup>20</sup> Nichols, John. *The progresses* (New York: AMS Press) 498.

<sup>21</sup> Nichols, John. *The progresses* (New York: AMS Press) 494-498.

Arthur. During Henry VII's march to London after being crowned on the battlefield at Bosworth, he touted a banner emblazoned with the Arthurian red dragon. Due to an obscure royal lineage, Henry VII sought to utilize a powerful technique of creating royal blood and associated the newly founded Tudor dynasty with King Arthur, commissioning genealogies to illustrate his descent as well as naming his firstborn son Arthur.<sup>22</sup> As such, Leicester's allusion to Arthurian inheritance arrogantly planted him as a possible match for Elizabeth to bring back the glory of the Arthurian days, a bold supposition, one which Elizabeth did not take kindly to. In fact, she needed convincing to stay for the entirety of the planned festivities.<sup>23</sup> Presuming upon one's status with the queen was an arrogant move to the woman who so carefully controlled those around her.

The festivities at Kenilworth took on an ethereal and romantic quality meant to please Elizabeth, which was aided by Greek mythology and Arthurian legend. Although Dudley's ultimate goal to tempt Elizabeth into marriage through the festivities failed, the sheer magnificence of the endless celebrations seem to have mollified her temper as she forgave the transgression of even entertaining the notion of a marriage and remained at Kenilworth. It is thought that these festivities were Shakespeare's inspiration for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The events at Kenilworth went down in history as one of the most extravagant celebrations in the Elizabethan age. It is immortalized in Sir Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*. Accounts of these festivities were also transformed into "The Masque at Kenilworth" which was first performed in 1864.

In a similar example, the Earl of Hertford understood that performance was an excellent method through which a courtier could build favor with the Queen. He managed to masterfully

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<sup>22</sup> N. J. Higham, *King Arthur, Myth-Making and History* (London: Routledge, 2002) 234-5.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, Jean. *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Great Britain: Redwood Burn Limited, 1980) 122.



utilize performance to completely change his fortunes, causing the queen to forgive old issues, and he escaped the black cloud of her anger. The summer of 1591 set the backdrop for one of the lushest entertainments to have ever occurred in Elizabethan England. Earlier that year, the Earl of Hertford caught wind of a rumor that Elizabeth was planning to surprise him with a visit at his more modest estate, Elvetham. The Earl had fallen out of favor with Elizabeth due to his secret marriage in 1560 to Katherine Grey, a cousin of the royal blood. Marrying a potential heir to the throne without the Queen's permission could be seen as treasonous. As a result he spent the next few decades under the ire of Elizabeth, paying enormous fines. The Earl therefore was in a position where he needed to greatly please Elizabeth. As a result of this rumor, he hurriedly commenced a spectacular refurbishment of the surrounding area including construction of a wooden castle and crescent-shaped lake — a reference to her moon goddess depiction — in anticipation of Elizabeth's visit. Upon arrival, Elizabeth was welcomed by Venus' handmaids, the Hours and Graces, "attired in gowns of taffata sarcenet of divers colours" singing "O beauteous Quene of second Troy, Accept of our unfained joy."<sup>24</sup> This performance compared Elizabeth to the Goddess Venus, a strong compliment to her alluring looks along with the reference to the famed beauty, Helen of Troy. In reality, Elizabeth was in her late fifties and her once fresh virginal face was now slathered in the popular white paint in an unsuccessful attempt to hide her wrinkled face. Despite her increasingly haggard appearance as old age set in, Elizabeth was determined to imagine herself as a young intense woman and she took great joy in the spectacular way in which her young courtiers seemingly bought into this illusion. The celebrations that continued throughout the visit were lavish and greatly pleased Elizabeth. In particular, one evening the faerie [fairy] queen danced and sang with her maids in the gardens which "so delighted Her Majesty, that shee commaunded to heare it sung and danced three times

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson, Jean. *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Great Britain: Redwood Burn Limited, 1980) 106.

over”.<sup>25</sup> The entertainments at Elvetham indeed enchanted Elizabeth and she departed in great spirits, her favor shining brilliantly upon the Earl of Hertford.<sup>26</sup> While the Earl would be imprisoned once again in 1595 due to Elizabeth’s increasing paranoia over threats to her throne, the entertainments at Elvetham seem to have aided in permitting Hertford to escape, for a time, the shadow of royal anger.

The portrayal of Greek gods and goddesses in theatre was a common theme in Elizabethan England that courtiers drew upon when they sought to flatter Elizabeth I. Time and again, as shown in the Christmas revelries of 1561 and the entertainments at Elvetham and Kenilworth, evidence of these mythological roles and ancient chivalric romantic themes was written into the performances sponsored by Elizabethan courtiers. Many times, these pleasing elements seem to have successfully gained Elizabeth’s admiration and favor. Men who were bent on attaching themselves to Elizabeth’s bountiful rewards including the Earl of Leicester seem to have gleaned favor through a constant barrage of lavish entertainments designed to thrill and excite the Queen.

There did exist, however, times when a performance would go terribly wrong, its message and resulting actions so highly offensive to Elizabeth that the host would be in grave danger. Robert Devereux, the Earl of Essex came into his position as court favorite following the death of his predecessor and stepfather, The Earl of Leicester. The relationship that unfolded between this young favorite and the dated Queen of England disturbed many. The Earl was given to histrionic displays designed to enrapture Elizabeth, which evidently succeeded while simultaneously irking his court adversaries, notably his greatest competitor was Sir Walter

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<sup>25</sup> Wilson, Jean. *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Great Britain: Redwood Burn Limited, 1980) 115-116.

<sup>26</sup> Wilson, Jean. *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Great Britain: Redwood Burn Limited, 1980) 118.

Raleigh. Essex's letters to Elizabeth, which are still preserved, illustrate the panegyric nature of his relationship with her.

Beginning in the 1590s, it became apparent that the once strong relationship between Elizabeth and Essex was caving to the attacks of other courtiers and slowly crumbling. Essex began to presume too much in his relationship and replaced his fawning sentiments with harsh criticisms. He also failed to lead a military expedition successfully in Ireland and rushed home, bursting into her chamber unannounced to seek her forgiveness and solace. A welcoming Elizabeth did not await. Essex rushed into her chambers when she was not yet dressed. More importantly, this incident had broken their performance. Elizabeth and Essex's relationship was based on his devotion to this beautiful virginal queen, an image which took hours of preparation in the morning for her to create. Essex had stumbled into the chambers not of the fresh, fair façade that Elizabeth struggled to maintain, but a woman with a "face...very aged...teeth are very yellow and unequal...Many of them are missing."<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth, who depended on her haughty queenly role which she had fashioned in court and with Essex, was humiliated to be caught unawares in her true physical form, out of costume. With the performer's mask unveiled, she was enraged with his arrogance and lack of ability, and was finally finished with the turbulent relationship and Essex's rapacious nature. He was banned from court and cut off from the abundant riches and prestige which it offered. In 1601, Essex seemed to lose his last grasp on sanity and following his friends' attendance of a performance of *Richard II* at the Globe Theatre, led an uprising of followers intended to march into court and force a confrontation with Elizabeth. This courtier had truly dropped the guise that he donned in the courts, destroying his

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<sup>27</sup> Dickinson, Janet. *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589-1601* (Pickering & Chatto Limited: London, 2012) 25.

once grand performance. Despite the fact that the Earl did not attend the play himself, the play's strong message of deposing a seemingly unsuitable monarch along with his alignment with his friends in the march on London was enough to terrify the Queen. Essex was sentenced to death and executed on February 25, 1601.<sup>28</sup>

Performance in Elizabethan England, then, was a complicated art with subtle nuances and complexities in roles that were difficult to master. The Earl of Essex who once was thought to be a master of this art managed to get twisted in his complicated web of sycophancy and as a result, his performance stumbled and he promptly tumbled from the heights to which he had risen.

Under the reign of James I, due to his wife Anne's great love of performance, theatre was transformed from its earlier form, which lacked stark contrasts and vivid imagery, and gave birth to the modern concept of the masque. The masque was a dramatic theatrical performance that included dancing, dialogue, and song. Although the masque's origins can be traced back to the renaissance courts of Italy and masques were used in a basic form across Europe for courtly celebrations, playwrights during the reign of James I developed this art form to include dramatic circumstances, elaborate costumes, dancing, acting, and music. One of the greatest developers of the masque in Jacobean England was Ben Jonson, who included intense drama and discordant aspects to popularize the festivity. In particular, he fused these inharmonious elements into the anti-masque, a chaotic dance that was interwoven into the actual masque itself. Ben Jonson wrote a large slew of warmly received masques including the *Masque of Blacknesse* (1605), *Masque of Beauty* (1608), and the *Masque of Queens* (1609). The masque was a pastime reserved for the elite. Upper-class members clamored for an invitation to these spectacles, which the king himself

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<sup>28</sup> Dickinson, Janet. *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589-1601* (Pickering & Chatto Limited: London, 2012) 36-44.

would attend. In a reign when theatre and masques were such a common theme surrounding holidays and momentous life events, an opportunity was laid out to catch James's attention with the messages which the popular masque could transmit.

One may look to the *Masque of the Metamorphosed Gypsies* performed in 1621 for a stunning example of how a courtier used theatre to build favor with the King. George Villiers sponsored this performance for James, which is about gypsies telling fortunes who are metamorphosed into English people under his presence and renounce their thievery. The overarching message was that James I would overcome corruption in England and create a stable country. What is more interesting about this masque is that Villiers himself played a role, the gypsy captain, who tells the King's fortune. The fortune states "from Heaven, on Earth to be the crown... to balance business, and to make all Christian differences cease...you can compose, to give them laws, as arbiter of war and peace...for this, of all the world, you shall be styled James the Just."<sup>29</sup> This fortune highlighted James's divine right as well as predicted a successful reign in which James would ease religious tension and justly rule a peaceful England. Lastly, Villiers portrays himself as the loyal servant that he is to James. The positive message of this play as well as James's fortune may have contributed to its popularity with audiences. It was presented on three separate occasions receiving widespread critical acclaim. Jacobean theatre goers loved it, the musical score was played in later years, and modern critics praise it. The hefty 300 pound investment that Villiers made into this theatrical performance for the King clearly paid off. Two years later in 1623, George Villiers was granted the title of Duke of Buckingham, a further advancement in his status as the undisputed favorite of King James I.

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<sup>29</sup> Nichols, John. "The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James I" (J.B. Nichols: London, 1828) 683.

## *~Intimate Relationships and Performances off*

### *Stage~*

Under the reign of both Elizabeth I and James I, many courtiers utilized the cultural outlet of theatre to host performances designed to flatter and impress their sovereigns and subsequently gain both attention and increased favor. Yet off of the stage, in the court arena with their adversaries and sovereign, the performance of roles and the donning of particular façades continued.

In everyday life within the courts of Elizabeth, many men sought the attention of the Queen and her conversation. Elizabeth was an intelligent woman with a commanding presence and she expected surrounding courtiers to be equally educated and impress her with the art of speech. Indeed, she was known as a master of rhetoric and often would actively partake in such conversations. She was also incredibly jealous of their attention and the role of a lovestruck and passionately devoted suitor was one that many courtiers performed to gain Elizabeth's favor. Several men proved to be masters of this artful performance.

Since the majority of verbal communications between Elizabeth and her courtiers took place in private and was unwritten, it is difficult to study such interactions. It is therefore necessary to take a look into personal written correspondence between Elizabeth and her various courtiers for evidence of these devotional interactions. A large number of Christopher Hatton's letters are preserved and contain an exaggerated romantic tone common to the interactions between Elizabeth and her courtiers. Many written records that we have are letters sent when the

favorites were distanced from their sovereign, explaining the desperate tones. In one letter three days absent of the Queen, Hatton wrote “my spirit and soul (I feel) agreeth with my body and life, that to serve you is heaven, but to lack you is more than hell’s torment unto them...love me; for I love you.”<sup>30</sup> In another letter he stated “this is the twelfth day since I saw the brightness of the sun that giveth light unto my sense and soul. I wax an amazed creature. Give me leave, Madam, to remove myself out of this irksome shadow.”<sup>31</sup> These letters are reminiscent of a loving devoted servant painfully removed from the presence of his mistress rather than a formal letter between subject and sovereign. Another letter expressing the pain of physical distance comes from Sir Walter Raleigh in 1592 to Robert Cecil, “my hart was never broken to this day that I hear the Queen goes away so farr of, whom I have followed so many yeares with so great love and desire.”<sup>32</sup> The Earl of Essex, a great contender in the game of displaying affection, wrote to Elizabeth in 1597 on the eve of his departure for battle. “And that infinite love which I bear your Maj. makes me now love myself for your favor’s sake...I humbly kiss your royal fair hands, and pour out my soul in passionate zealous wishes of all true joys to the dear heart of your Maj.”<sup>33</sup>

The romantic tone of letters that courtiers sent to Elizabeth is common. What is not seen is Elizabeth reciprocating this feverous devotion. This was deliberate as the Queen was the master of the courtier’s game and was careful to balance favor with courtiers expecting, but not

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<sup>30</sup> Nicolas, Nicholas Harris. *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton: Including His Correspondence with the Queen and Other Distinguished Persons* (R. Bentley: London, 1847) 25-26.

<sup>31</sup> Nicolas, Nicholas Harris. *Memoirs of the Life and Times of Sir Christopher Hatton* (R. Bentley: London, 1847) 27.

<sup>32</sup> Dickinson, Janet. *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589-1601* (Pickering & Chatto Limited: London, 2012) 28.

<sup>33</sup> Devereux, Walter. *Lives and Letters of the Devereux, Earls of Essex In the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I: 1540-1646* (John Murray: London, 1853) 425-427.

returning such passionate declarations. Courtiers were expected to be wholly dependent on their mistress' will. Although her affection may have been gleaned from Elizabeth's actions such as the granting of gifts or emotional behavior, she never subjugated herself to the men around her.

The relationship between James and his favorites is a complete reversal from Elizabethan England. In these relationships, James is utterly dependent on the attention of these men, pining away for them in their absence, lavishing them in love and adoration when together. Where Elizabeth never reciprocated the affections of her courtiers, James was infamous for his passionate devotion to his favorites. Says historian McElwee of one such instance, "He [James] appeared everywhere with his arm round Carr's neck, constantly kissed and fondled him... pinching his cheeks and smoothing his hair."<sup>34</sup> The relationship between courtier and sovereign was determined by the sovereign and James's softer personality molded these relationships into an entirely different form than Elizabeth's. The written correspondence between James and his favorites paints the King as a doting lover writing pretty verse for his courtiers while the favorites in return express obedience and fidelity, but generally lack the desperation that is noticeable on James's part. In a letter from James's first great favorite, Esme Stuart, he states "it would please God...to make it apparent to you how great is the fidelity which is engraven within my heart, which will last eternally."<sup>35</sup>

Not all of James's favorites based their relationship with him off of material desires. The one courtier whose letters return the feverish devotion was arguably his greatest favorite, George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. He wrote in 1623, "Sir, my heart and very soul dances for

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<sup>34</sup> Bergeron, David. *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999) 68.

<sup>35</sup> Bergeron, David. *King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999) 44-46.



joy; for the change will be no less than to leap from trouble to ease, from sadness to mirth, nay from hell to heaven...my thoughts are only bent on having my dear Dad and master's legs soon in my arms."<sup>36</sup> The relationship between James and Buckingham seems to have been genuine, passionate, and mutually dependent. James addressed most of his letters to Buckingham with "my sweet Steenie." In one letter his desperation rings through, "I am now so miserable a coward, as I do nothing but weep and mourn...without speaking to anybody and the tears trickling down my cheeks, as now they do that I can scarcely see to write. But alas, what shall I do at our parting?"<sup>37</sup> He also on one occasion spoke to his Privy Council in 1617: I, James, am neither a god nor an angel, but a man like any other. Therefore, I act like a man, and confess to loving those dear to me more than other men. You may be sure that I love the Earl of Buckingham more than anyone else, and more than you who are here assembled...Christ had his John and I have my George.<sup>38</sup>

While Elizabeth was always the dominant figure in her relationships and masterfully controlled the men around her, those in James's court conversely controlled him, some with rapacious intentions. Several favorites manipulated James's affections to gain large monetary settlements, positions in court for their family members, and increased political power for themselves. The motivations for playing on the King's emotional vulnerability were not always selfish; they were sometimes spurred on by others.

James's family life was difficult from the very beginning. His childhood was crippled by the death of his father as well as his mother Mary's flight from Scotland in 1568. His marriage to Anne of Denmark was an unhappy one and his relationship with his children was marred with

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<sup>36</sup> Bergeron, David. *King James* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999) 135.

<sup>37</sup> Bergeron, David. *King James* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999) 150.

<sup>38</sup> Bergeron, David. *King James* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999) 103-104.

difficulty. As a result, the disaffected immediate members of James's family relied on favorites to gain his support. In particular, The Duke of Buckingham proved instrumental to the royal family's needs.<sup>39</sup> James's daughter, Princess Elizabeth sought Buckingham's intercession with her father when he failed to provide aid to her following her flight from Prague, urging him to "shew himself a loving father to us, and not suffer his children's inheritance to be taken away."<sup>40</sup> Despite his natural resentment of him, James's son, Charles, also relied on Buckingham's help to solve a dispute which had arisen between him and James at one point, writing a written plea for his aid.<sup>41</sup> It is clear that those who wished to entreat the King for any cause, even those nearest to him, recognized the power of court favorites and the influence with which they could affect the outcome of a situation. James suffered from a fragmented family and as a result possibly felt extremely isolated. The attractive men who became James's favorites entered his life with confidence, establishing a strong connection and he became emotionally reliant on them. Court favorites during the reign of King James I recognized his extreme emotional dependence upon them and manipulated these emotions to gain a desired outcome or benefit for themselves and other involved parties.

Maintaining a relationship with either Elizabeth I or James I must have been a difficult prospect for court favorites. Despite the fact that these monarchs were the most powerful people in their own country, even comparably in the world, they were still fragile, vulnerable to the same human emotions and relationships that affect us all. James was very vocal in his love for the Duke of Buckingham while Elizabeth's great affection for the Earl of Leicester can be gleaned from details. Famously upon her death, she was found to have a letter from Leicester on

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<sup>39</sup> Bergeron, David. *Royal Family, Royal Lovers King James of England and Scotland* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1991) 139.

<sup>40</sup> Bergeron, David. *Royal Family, Royal Lovers* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1991) 147-149.

<sup>41</sup> Bergeron, David. *Royal Family, Royal Lovers* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1991) 155-156.

her person on which she had written, “his last letter.”<sup>42</sup> Despite living a life constantly surrounded by courtiers and servants, one can imagine how truly isolated and lonely these ruling figures may have felt at times, leading to a desire for personal and private human contact. As the relationships between these monarchs and their favorites decidedly contained strong romantic qualities, they seem to have also followed a tumultuous pattern, ripe with lovers’ quarrels and disputes.

Elizabeth’s highly publicized relationship with Robert Dudley was fraught with these tensions. One such issue arose while the Earl was on a military campaign in the Low Countries in 1585. He accepted an offer to govern over the region without consulting the Queen, a decision that infuriated her. Her response was swift and furious. “How contemptuously we conceive ourself to have been used by you... we could never have imagined had we not seen it fall out in experience that a man raised up by ourself and extraordinarily favoured by us above any other subject of this land, would have in so contemptible a sort broken our commandment.”<sup>43</sup> Even being so far away, Leicester must have felt the scorching anger of Elizabeth’s wrath. Yet despite this anger, a mere five months later in July of 1586, Elizabeth wrote again to Leicester, pardoning him of all past transgressions: “Rob, I am afraid you will suppose by my wandering writings that a midsummer moon hath taken large possession of my brains this month... I pray God bless you from all harm and save you from all foes...as you know, ever the same. E.R.”<sup>44</sup> Even interlaced in her writings is a drawing of two eyes, her affectionate nickname of her everlasting favorite. Despite such explosive quarrels arising between the two, Elizabeth and Leicester always made up within a relatively short amount of time, back to peaceful relations.

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<sup>42</sup> Personal correspondence from the Earl of Leicester to Queen Elizabeth, 1588. Accessed online: <http://tudorhistory.org/letters/lastletter.jpg>

<sup>43</sup> Harrison, G.B. *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth* (Northumberland Press Limited: Great Britain, 1935) 174.

<sup>44</sup> Harrison, G.B. *The Letters of Queen Elizabeth* (Northumberland Press Limited: Great Britain, 1935) 178-179.

James experienced the same turbulent relations with his favorites oftentimes ending in disaster, however, rather than continuity. James's second great favorite Robert Carr, the Earl of Somerset, entered the court scene in the beginning of James's reign over his new country, England. Following a deeply involved affair, his relationship with James was rapidly deteriorating by 1615 as Somerset's ego grew extensively. James wrote a letter to him addressing his feelings. "Especially of late since this strange frenzy took you,...strange streams of unquietness, passion, fury, and insolent pride, and (which is worst of all) with a settled kind of induced obstinacy as it chokes and obscures all these excellent and good parts...Next, your fiery boutades [sudden outbursts] were coupled with a continual dogged sullen behaviour toward me."<sup>45</sup> James portrays a wounded lover, hurt and rejected by his partner's callous behavior. The relationship between the two was never reconciled. Somerset's involvement in the famous Overbury murder was discovered and he was eventually sentenced to death. Although James saved him from the ultimate punishment, Robert Carr never again returned to court, living his life simply, ostracized and forgotten by the King.

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The performances of the courtiers in Elizabethan and Jacobean courts mastered the intricate dance between themselves and their sovereign. These high stakes relationships were not easy to maintain and in fact, many failed. While a few men such as Robert Carr and Robert Devereux rose to the position of favorite, they were unable to maintain the relationship for long, becoming overconfident in their own independence. They forgot the one major rule, that Elizabeth and James wanted their courtiers to be wholly dependent on them despite the close relations. When men faltered in this complicated dance and forgot this rule, as Robert Carr did when he began to ignore James, they lost all semblance of respect, wealth, and favoritism. Life at

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<sup>45</sup> Bergeron, David. *Royal Family, Royal Lovers* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 1991) 129.

court was a constant and complex masquerade where a courtier needed to perform the complicated steps perfectly in competition with others while donning a beautiful façade in front of their queen or king. For those who mastered this performance, a bright and shining future awaited. Should the slightest crack appear in this beautiful orchestrated illusion, the courtier's entire career and aspirations could tumble down.

### ~*The Tilt*~

The tilt, commonly referred to as jousting was another performance during which courtiers could ingratiate themselves to the monarch. Jousting was a major event that took place in the royal courts of Europe dating back to the 1400s. It originated with the knightly warfare that was practiced in medieval times and slowly gave way to a sport and performance in later years. The role of a knight was not simply that of a warrior. In the medieval ages, they were leaders of the community, and their image was based off of chivalric principles including strength, courtesy to women, and a superior education. These romantic ideals perpetuated into the tilt competitions that were held in Elizabethan and Jacobean England where courtiers competed as another avenue to gain prominence and advance in court politics.

Tilting tournaments were especially popular under the reigns Elizabeth and James. It is important to note that violence was not present in the daily courts of Elizabeth and James. Rather, it was a readiness for violence that was respected in a courtier, stemming from the belief that a knight was always prepared to defend his honor and that of whom he protected. *The Book of The Courtier* discusses ideal court behavior in regards to violence: “when a man perceiveth that he is entred so far that hee can not draw backe without burthen, hee must..be utterly resolved

with him selfe, and alwaies shew a readinesse and a stomacke [stomach]”.<sup>46</sup> With the creation of the accession day tilts in Elizabeth’s reign, tilting tournaments became some of the most prestigious events in a given year. Accession day marked the date on which a ruler had to the throne and these dates annually played host to huge celebrations. Any event that could be hosted in a ruler’s name was given to establish their power, generosity, and fame. The accession day tilts are especially important to any analysis here in that they were only held during the reigns of Elizabeth and James. They were first created by Elizabeth’s “champion,” Henry Lee Ditchley, whose role was to defend her honor in combat, if necessary. What began as a mere outlet for sporting and performance developed quickly into an elaborate show where thousands watched as Elizabeth’s best men flaunted their physique, prose, and athleticism in an attempt to flatter her in the highest form possible as well as to gain the admiration of a large audience. The accession day tilts were an amalgamation of both the sport itself and the highly cultured chivalric principles of performance and eloquent speaking that the court of Elizabethan England was largely based on.

The accession day tilts elevated jousting to prominence and the eyes of thousands of spectators were fixated on the performing knights, creating a strong opportunity for advancement and power. In addition, Elizabeth managed to transform the popular accession day tilts into a dedication unto herself that served to flatter and celebrate her. These tilts attracted thousands of guests; even the public was admitted if they could pay the required entrance fee.<sup>47</sup> A grand and permanent stadium had been constructed at Whitehall Palace during Henry VIII’s reign and this is where the accession day tilts were held. This stadium which seated about 10,000 spectators was where the Queen and elite members of society were seated in the lavish top box while others

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<sup>46</sup> Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of The Courtier* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd: 1928) 40.

<sup>47</sup> Strong (1987):137-138; Young, p. 208

would fill in the more basic lower seats.<sup>48</sup> These emotionally charged events would begin with a knight entering the stadium in a procession, surrounded by his retinue of servants. They mounted the stands dressed in elaborate armor as a character who they wished to portray, using their servants in costume as a support. They would then address the Queen with eloquent speech and prose.<sup>49</sup> If they were lucky, Elizabeth would take on her own role and confidently banter with the knight. The characters that they chose were often artfully designed to complement one of Elizabeth's many representations such as a Greek goddess or Arthurian legend. The day would then be filled with rotating entrance processions, powerful speeches, and jousting, ending with one champion. This champion was typically honored at a later feast and given special treatment by the monarch. Under James I, the same structure was performed on accession day tilts, but perhaps lacking some of the lurid imagery that the cult of Elizabeth sought to execute. King's Day tilts served as a celebration of James's reign and generosity and touted his greatest followers.

Jousting was a field in which courtiers could combine several of the courtly arts into one large, eye-catching performance. In the tilting tournaments of Elizabeth, romanticism was exemplified in all of the competitors' actions. They were expected to wear spectacular costumes as well as comport themselves gracefully and speak eloquently. The overall goal of a knight's role in the tilt was to portray renaissance ideals while paying tribute to his queen. No opportunity to compliment Elizabeth was missed. On the accession day tilt of November 1590, Elizabeth's champion Sir Henry Lee resigned from his post due to old age. A replacement was needed and found in the Earl of Cumberland, who appeared attired in "plumes and pendants as white as

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<sup>48</sup> David Bevington, ed. (1998). *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 0-521-59436-7. pp42-3

<sup>49</sup> Yates, Frances. *Elizabethan Chivalry: The Romance of The Accession Day Tilts*. Journal of The Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, Volume 20, No. ½ (Jan-June 1957) 6-7. Accessed online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/750148?seq=6>

swan...blue armor...studded with gold stars...decorated with bands of gold and jewels.”<sup>50</sup> The old champion and the new ceremoniously stepped up on the platform before Elizabeth where “Her Majesty, beholding these armed Knights coming toward her, did suddenly hear a musicke so sweete and secret, as every one thereat greatly marveled. And hearkening to that excellent melodie, the earth as it were opening, there appeared a pavilion, made of white taffata, containing eight score ells, being in proportion, like unto the sacred Temple of the Virgin’s Vestall...upon the altar also, were layd certaine princely presents, which after, by three Virgins, were presented unto her Majestie.”<sup>51</sup> In front of the pavilion was a crowned pillar surrounded by an Eglantine tree that was a symbol of Elizabeth. The pillar was inscribed with a poem about Elizabeth. The audience was greatly impressed with this performance, causing the acceptance of Sir Henry Lee’s successor as suitable. It may have even served to portray Cumberland as a courtier of some eminence. In one simple jousting scene, performance, speech, poetry, and wardrobe were all utilized to flatter the Queen and build up the reputation of a competing knight. Such an exercise was not uncommon in the Elizabethan tilts.

In 1590, the Earl of Essex was competing and in a grave position as he had angered the Queen by his recent failure on a campaign in Ireland. In a typical dramatic Elizabethan fashion, he entered the arena “all in sable sad, Drawn on with coal-black steeds of dusky hue, In stately chariot full of deep device.”<sup>52</sup> He was placed on a funeral bier in mourning, and dressed in black sable armor embroidered with white designs, Elizabeth’s colors. Unfortunately for Essex, the Queen did not easily forgive him and refused to take part in this performance. The outfit the Earl of Essex wore is immortalized in a painting by William Segar (Figure I).

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<sup>50</sup> Ashelford, Jane. *Dress in the Age of Elizabeth* (B.T. Batsford Ltd. London: 1988) 135.

<sup>51</sup> Nichols, John. *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I* (Nichols: London, 1828) 46-47.  
<http://archive.org/stream/progressespublic03nichuoft#page/46/mode/2up>

<sup>52</sup> Ashelford, Jane. *Dress in the Age of Elizabeth* (B.T. Batsford Ltd. London: 1988) 135.





Figure I

In 1581 during Elizabeth's reign, political machinations occurred which provide a vivid window into how courtiers were able to utilize the tilt to influence the Queen. A tilt was held in honor of visiting French ambassadors and Francis, the Duke of Alencon, who was a suitor of Elizabeth. Due to his Catholic faith, Francis was wildly unpopular with many in England including the Earl of Arundel, Sir Philip Sidney, the Lord Windsor, and Master Fulke Grevile. These four men staged a performance at the tilt called "The Four Foster Children of Desire" to convey their message of opposition. The four men entered in a marvelous processional with horses dressed in golden and silver cloth, hats, feathers, and pearls along with thirty men each. Following a scene where the foster children of desire stormed the castle of beauty, they made a speech. "So as nowe from summoning this Castel to yeld, they are fallen lowly to beseech you to vouchsafe your eyes out of that Impregnable Fortresse, to beholde what will fal out betwixt them and your famous knights: wherein though they bee so overpressed with the others vallure..will they make this whole assemblie witnesses so farre of their wil, That sooner their souls shall leave

their bodies than Desire shall leave souls.”<sup>53</sup> The knights were clearly spreading the message that they opposed a match between Elizabeth and Francis, Duke of Alencon while avoiding igniting her temper by couching the argument in endearing terms. They made it apparent that they knew they were overstepping their bounds, but the message nonetheless, needed to be conveyed. In the end of the performance, a young page offered an olive branch, a symbol of peace, to Elizabeth from the four foster children of desire. Whether Elizabeth considered the opinions of these men is unknown, but in the end she did not marry Francis, Duke of Alencon. This performance provides a vivid window into how courtiers were able to utilize the tilt to influence the Queen.

Under the reign of King James I accession day tilts continued in grand style. It was on his accession day tilt in March of 1607 that one of his favorites was discovered in an anomalous situation. Robert Carr had previously served for a brief period as a groom of the bedchamber in 1604, but had not caught James’s eye. His fortune changed during the accession day tilt in 1607, whether by accident or design, when he fell off of his horse and broke his leg. James felt great sympathy for the young and handsome Carr, deciding to nurse him back to health.<sup>54</sup> During Carr’s recuperation period, James attempted to teach him Latin. They spent many hours a day closeted away together leaving James completely enamored by the time Robert Carr recovered. From then on he became the undisputed court favorite, knighted only nine months after his infamous accident. Carr’s career skyrocketed almost overnight and he became the recipient of very wealthy land and monetary gifts. He was also granted many new titles including Viscount Rochester in 1611 and the Earl of Somerset in November of 1613.

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<sup>53</sup> Wilson, Jean. *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Great Britain: Redwood Burn Limited, 1980) 82.

<sup>54</sup> Bellany, Alastair. ‘Carr , Robert, earl of Somerset (1585/6?–1645)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/4754>, accessed 21 Feb 2013]

As Somerset's power grew, he became more involved in court politics and eventually affected his relationship with James. Originally a Scottish outsider, Somerset brokered friendships with some of England's most powerful Protestant families including the Southamptons and the Pembrokes. Such mediating pulled him directly into a divisive religious conflict that was undermining the court. He eventually set his eyes, though, on the beautiful Frances Howard, the miserable wife of the third Earl of Essex. Somerset was impassioned and determined to marry the Catholic Frances, resulting in an alliance with the other side of court factions including the Howards, Northamptons, and Suffolks.

The Earl's political shifting and manipulations served to create a large faction of bitter enemies at court who would ultimately scheme against him and bring into court a young contender to compete with Somerset for the position of favorite. Throughout these political dealings, the Earl of Somerset had become very close friends with a courtier, Thomas Overbury. This close friendship angered two people. First, James grew to be very jealous of their closeness and offered Overbury a commission that would remove him from the court. When Overbury refused, he was thrown into the Tower of London. Second, the Protestant Overbury opposed Frances Howard's divorce and marriage to Somerset as she sided against Overbury, with the Catholics. Frances grew irked by Overbury's interference in her annulment proceedings and it is largely thought that she had him poisoned to death in 1613 while he was imprisoned in the tower. At first, no foul play was suspected in Overbury's death and Somerset continued his career as the favorite and even finally celebrated a lavish marriage with the newly divorced Frances Howard. Soon though, many factors began to work against Somerset.

The Earl of Somerset had grown to be too self-assured of his position and power in court, forgetting who he owed. He grew lax in his dedication to and wooing of James, causing the King

great pain. In a letter he wrote to Somerset in 1615, he says “of late since this strange frenzy took you, so powdered and mixed with strange streams of unquietness, passion, fury, and insolent pride...Remember that all your being, except your breathing and soul, is from me. I told you twice or thrice that ye might lead me by the heart and not by the nose...If ever I find that ye think to retain me by one sparkle of fear, all the violence of my love will in that instant be changed in[to] as violent a hatred.”<sup>55</sup> Clearly James’s affection for Somerset was fast receding as the latter’s dedication faded and arrogance grew. In 1614, James had been introduced to the exceedingly attractive George Villiers and showed evidence of a growing fondness for the young man. This new relationship contributed to his alienation from Somerset as he lost interest in him and Somerset became embittered with jealousy. Combined with all of the emotional turmoil, Somerset’s venomous enemies had uncovered evidence of his involvement in Overbury’s death. A shocked James had Somerset and his wife placed under house arrest, which eventually turned into imprisonment in the Tower of London and a guilty sentence under trial. In the end, James could not bear to send a warrant for his old favorite’s execution, but the man who had been the Earl of Somerset, now stripped of his titles, lived out the remainder of his life in desolate exile. Robert Carr had begun his career with a fortuitous fall from his horse at the tilt, but eventually took another fall from grace which ruined his entire career.

The tilting tournaments under James I and their practice of impressing the audience was a common practice. The jousting arena was a place to make your name and face known to the audience, oftentimes filled with influential figures. Foreign ambassadors frequently attended tournaments where their power was shown through the position that they sat in the stands, often close to the King or Queen, and where they could observe powerful courtiers who entered the

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<sup>55</sup> Bergeron, David. *King James and Homoerotic Desire* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 1999) 81-83.

field for competition. On the King's Day tilt of 1620, the French Ambassador asked "which was the better place, that on the right-hand as of custome, or the other on the left as of respect, and nearest to the king?"<sup>56</sup> Position within the stands of a tilting tournament, as well as with masques, was an important topic. The view of prominent knights/courtiers from the stands encouraged ambassadors to closely observe these men. A tilt was held for the French Ambassador himself in 1620 as well where George Villiers was notably on display. He was "full of delicacie and handsome features"<sup>57</sup>, catching the notice of the ambassador who spoke with him for an extended period following the jousting.

The tilt flourished with the accession-day tilts that took place under James and Elizabeth. Jousting was a culmination of many of the court's artistic virtues and an arena where courtiers were able to influence their sovereign's decisions as well as promote themselves.

## *~Dance~*

Dance was a centerpiece of agility and beauty in the courts of Elizabeth I and James I, and like performance and the tilt, a very important way for courtiers to distinguish themselves and gain power and authority at court. Dance permeated nearly every aspect of courtly rituals where politics took place: from procession into a room utilizing the stately pavane; the lively galliard to showcase dance mastery in a ballroom for an important event such as an ambassadorial visit; dancing at nearly every court event or revel including the risqué la Volta; and even daily exercise. A thorough education and execution of dance was an important aspect

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<sup>56</sup> Nichols, John. "The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James I" (J.B. Nichols: London, 1828) 659.

<sup>57</sup> Nichols, John. "The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James I" (J.B. Nichols: London, 1828) 646-647.

of a courtier's polished veneer. It served as a first impression and a last, used to impress a monarch, a visiting ambassador, or other courtiers. As dance held such a large role in the royal courts, courtiers and monarchs alike devoted much time to the study and practice of dance and perfecting their steps. *The Book of The Courtier* states "let him laugh, jest, banter, frolic, and dance...that everything he may do or say shall be stamped with grace".<sup>58</sup>

The courts of Elizabeth and James fell under the influence of the Renaissance, in particular their dances. A French Ambassador, De Maisse, noted about Elizabeth "She takes great pleasure in dancing and music. She told me that she entertained at least sixty musicians; in her youth she danced very well, and composed measures and music, and had played them herself and danced them...without doubt she is a mistress of the art, having learnt in the Italian manner to dance high."<sup>59</sup> Dances were adapted to match these fashionable and modern Italian variations, including the lively, bouncy galliard, the stately and majestic pavane, and the daring La Volta. The galliard became the performance piece where a performer was able to showcase their finesse, speed, and attractive figure. Men in particular used the galliard as they held the dominant role in the dance and wore tights that accentuated their muscular legs whereas the women's legs were obscured by their skirts. The galliard consisted of very basic dance steps and composed moves that dancers were able to memorize and instantaneously combine on the dance floor at a court event.<sup>60</sup> These desultory combinations illustrated a dancer's skill and inventiveness if a new move was added in and piqued the audience's attention.

A courtier's dancing and courtly performances were the first indicator of their ability as a true courtier or favorite. Elizabeth and James were both well versed in these practices and for

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<sup>58</sup> Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of The Courtier*. (Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1903) Accessed online: [http://archive.org/stream/bookofcourtier00castuoft/bookofcourtier00castuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/bookofcourtier00castuoft/bookofcourtier00castuoft_djvu.txt). Book 1, 25.

<sup>59</sup> A.H. de Maisse, *Journal*, trans. G.B. Harrison and R.A. Jones (London, 1931) 95.

<sup>60</sup> Daye, Anne. 'Youthful Revels, Masks, and Courtly Sights' Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, 1996. 17.

Elizabeth dance was a daily routine. A gentleman of the Privy Chamber wrote in 1589 that, “My Lord, the Queen is so well as I assure you, six or seven galliards in a morning, besides the music and singing, is her ordinary exercise.”<sup>61</sup> Elizabeth and James both took on a very critical role when observing dance in some cases becoming irate if dancers failed to live up to their expectations. Elizabeth was known in her later years to admonish her maids whose dancing was not up to par.<sup>62</sup> Similarly James, who was irascible like Elizabeth, grew angry at a performance of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* when dancers “began to lag, whereupon the king... got impatient and shouted aloud, ‘Why don’t we dance? What did you make me come here for? The devil take you all- dance!’”<sup>63</sup> Good dancing also caught their attention as was seen of Christopher Hatton who “came to court by the galliard”. As we will in a moment see, the Duke of Buckingham’s dancing also attracted James’s focus which created a cornerstone to his career as favorite. These two monarchs clearly had their gaze fixated on the dance floor when the occasion arose and either good or bad dancing could change a performer’s life.

The rise of King James’s last and greatest favorite, George Villiers, was not accidental and was due in no small part to dance. In fact, his entrance into court had been orchestrated many years before. His mother, Mary Villiers, sought an entrance into the court circles for George, and finally found one in her third husband, Sir Thomas Compton. In his youth, Villiers was sent to a school where he excelled in the courtly arts such as dancing, fencing, writing, and equestrianism, among others.<sup>64</sup> He and his brother then continued on to study at a finishing school in France for three years where they polished their newly acquired skills. By this time, James’s current

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<sup>61</sup> Brissenden, Alan. *Shakespeare and The Dance*. (MacMillan Press Ltd: London, 1981) 4-5,

<sup>62</sup> Brissenden, Alan. *Shakespeare and The Dance*. (MacMillan Press Ltd: London, 1981) 5.

<sup>63</sup> Daye, Anne. ‘Youthful Revels, Masks, and Courtly Sights’: an introductory study of the revels within the Stuart masque, *Historical Dance* Volume 3, Number 4. Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, 1996. 18.

<sup>64</sup> Roger Lockyer, ‘Villiers, George, first duke of Buckingham (1592–1628)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/28293>, accessed 27 Jan 2013]

favorite, the Earl of Somerset, had made great enemies at court including the Earl of Pembroke, Sir John Graham, and Archbishop Abbott who wished to depose him from his seat of power. These men in court took advantage of Villiers' handsome face and polished manners, planning to use him to supplant Somerset. They hoped that with the downfall of the arrogant Somerset, the Howard family who allied themselves with him, and with Catholic Spain, would fall too. If the mighty Howard family collapsed, other great families such as the Pembrokes might ascend to power, along with a Protestant influence on James.<sup>65</sup>

As nineteenth-century historian John Nichols explains, Villiers was then introduced to King James I in 1614 at Apethorpe where the King was "delighted, almost to a fascination, by a fine figure and countenance, and a graceful carriage."<sup>66</sup> Undoubtedly, the dancing that took place at Apethorpe highlighted Villiers' attractive figure and caught James's attention. Following this meeting, Villiers was given the position of royal cupbearer, placing him physically near the king. This was not enough though, and when the masque of *Mercury Vindicated* was performed in 1615, Villiers was cast as one of the dancers in an attempt to attract James yet again through his superb dancing.<sup>67</sup> He also was cast as a dancer in *The Golden Age Restored*, a deliberate move by court plotters. In 1615, Villiers was appointed a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, Master of the Horse in 1616, and the Earldom of Buckingham in 1617. As Buckingham continued to dance beautifully, James and the court around him became further enraptured. At a performance of

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<sup>65</sup> Roger Lockyer, 'Villiers, George, first duke of Buckingham (1592–1628)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2011 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/view/article/28293>, accessed 13 Feb 2013]

<sup>66</sup> Nichols, John. *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, His Royal Consort, Family, and Court: collected from original MSS., scarce pamphlets, corporation records, parochial records*. Volume III, Part I. (J.B. Nichols: London, 1828) Accessed online: <[http://www.archive.org/stream/progressesproces03nichuoft/progressesproces03nichuoft\\_djvu.txt](http://www.archive.org/stream/progressesproces03nichuoft/progressesproces03nichuoft_djvu.txt)> Accessed 1/27/13.

<sup>67</sup> Ben Jonson Journal. Volume 19, Page 88-104 DOI 10.3366/bjj.2012.0041, ISSN 1079-3453, Available Online May 2012. Accessed online: <<http://www.eupublishing.com/doi/abs/10.3366/bjj.2012.0041>> Accessed 1/27/13



*Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, written by Ben Jonson, “The Marquis of Buckingham, his Majesty’s favorite, immediately sprang forward, cutting a score of lofty and minute capers with so much grace and agility that he not only appeased the ire of his angry lord but rendered himself the admiration and delight of everybody.”<sup>68</sup> Buckingham’s spectacular career flourished following Somerset’s collapse and he only grew in his role as James’s royal devotee, enjoying the lavish rewards until James’s death in 1625. In fact, Buckingham continued his career as favorite into the next reign, a rare occurrence, since he had established such a strong relationship with the royal family, Charles I included. The Duke of Buckingham is a perfect example of how a courtier could learn the steps of a dance to perfection while also adding in their own personal flourish and style to enchant their monarch and obtain and then maintain a strong foothold in the position of court favorite.

In the court of Elizabeth, Christopher Hatton danced his way into the inner circles largely through impressing Elizabeth with his charming looks and gregarious manners. All it took in his case was the dancing of one galliard and Queen Elizabeth’s attention and favor was completely focused upon him. Hatton’s entire court career was one beautiful intricate metaphorical dance that led him to a successful political career and great wealth as well as a role in pioneering English overseas explorations. Sir Hatton had certainly found a niche in the Queen’s favor and remained there, beloved until his death in 1591.

The Earl of Leicester, having enjoyed an extensive career at court spanning several decades, left a perennial mark on the dance practices of Elizabethan England. His prominent position/role in many performances such as the Christmas revels of 1561 are recorded in depth.

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<sup>68</sup> Daye, Anne. ‘*Youthful Revels, Masks, and Courtly Sights*’ Dolmetsch Historical Dance Society, 1996. 18.

John Nichols states that “His gaiety appears by having one of the best dances of the age, called from his title ‘The Leicester Dance.’”<sup>69</sup> Clearly, attention was fixated on the work of one of England’s most powerful men and his dance served to immortalize his prominent qualities. His dance prowess was a greatly admired trait in a courtier, one which he invested a lot of time and effort into. The galliard was not simply a dance in the courts of Elizabethan England, it contributed to a courtier’s polished veneer, and also served as a vehicle for expression of the positive traits of a courtier, impressing all who watched.

Dancing in the courts of Elizabeth and James was a necessity to have in one’s arsenal of court skills to succeed in the courtier competition. Not only was dance a tool to blend in, it could be used to stand out as is the case with both the Duke of Buckingham and Sir Christopher Hatton. Dance took place in the very heart of the court and held great prominence in the minds of both monarchs. If one could catch a monarch’s eye and permission to approach them, the courtier could gain entrée into their good grace and share their ideas which the King or Queen may take a liking to. After one idea took root, they would continually call on that courtier for advice and raise them through the ranks. Dancing could offer a foothold within the folds of court for a courtier as well as lead them through a dazzling lifetime- if only one could consistently maintain and excel at the proper steps and performances.

## ~Wardrobe~

“Men...are not knowne by words and deedes, more than by the garments.”<sup>70</sup> In an age where appearance reigned supreme, wardrobe was definitely no exception. Both Elizabeth and

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<sup>69</sup> Nichols, John. “The progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth” Vol. II (New York: AMS Press) 620.

<sup>70</sup> Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of The Courtier* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd: 1928) 118.

James felt that their status allowed them to be the most extravagantly dressed in the land. Both stacked up large expenses to create stunning visual effects with their wardrobe as part of their efforts to manifest and enhance their royal power. As a result of this monarchical emphasis on wardrobe, courtiers also invested a large amount of thought and money to fund visual magnificence of their own and to bring to life the representations and symbolism of their rulers which they so often portrayed and alluded to.

Court dress in Elizabethan and Jacobean England was by large a result of changing Renaissance fashions. The designs that had sprung up in Italy had spread through the rest of Europe, England included. The women of the nobility who functioned within the courts wore dresses composed of many parts. The outfit began with a shift, corset, stockings, and several petticoats. The women then donned a heavy outer gown that was made of lush fabrics and embroidered heavily with jewels, beading, and fur. The excessive beading and decorations had not been present prior to the Renaissance. The Renaissance also brought about lower necklines, slashing in the sleeves, and fanciful headdresses. The women in the court sought to emulate Elizabeth in all clothing styles. Men's clothing consisted of hose, or a pair of tights, an undershirt, a doublet, and a jacket. With the advent of the Renaissance, less constrictive clothing was created to allow the now prized dancing and performance. Bright colors, lush fabrics, and elaborate embroideries were also added to clothing for men.<sup>71</sup> Renaissance clothing embodied the lively ideology of the Renaissance movement. As *The Book Of The Courtier* states, "For there is no doubt, but upon armor it is more meete to have sightly and merrie colours, and also garments for pleasure, cut, pompous and rich."<sup>72</sup> To impress their monarch with wardrobe, courtiers expanded upon these new fashion trends to outdo others.

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<sup>71</sup> Eubank, K. & Tortora, P. *A Survey of Historic Costume* (New York: Fairchild, 1989).

<sup>72</sup> Castiglione, Baldassare. *The Book of The Courtier* (London, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd: 1928) 116.

As this paper has suggested, Elizabeth I invested greatly in her image. Wardrobe was one of the ways in which she was able to support the virginal and beautiful image that she promoted. It is estimated that at her death there were nearly 3,000 gowns in her wardrobe.<sup>73</sup> Records of Elizabeth at court are riddled with descriptions of her luxurious clothing, laden with glimmering jewels. French ambassador Andre DeMaise wrote in 1597, “This day she was habited, as is her custom, in silver tissue, or ‘gauze’, as we call it in French...She wore innumerable jewels on her person, not only on her head, but also within her collar, about her arms and on her head, with a very great quantity of pearls, round her neck and on her bracelets.”<sup>74</sup> Elizabeth’s predilection for jewelry, particularly for pearls, became apparent to courtiers who frequently gifted her with such



Figure 2

items. Records of New Year’s gifts to the queen show a vast number of the gifts were pieces of jewelry. On New Year’s of 1589, the Marquesse of Northampton gifted Elizabeth with a pair of gold bracelets inlaid with pearls, rubies, and diamonds.<sup>75</sup> Several portraits of Elizabeth reveal the intensive symbolism and status which was portrayed by her gown. In Elizabeth’s “Rainbow Portrait”, painted in 1600, she is portrayed as an eternally virginal youth. Her gown is embroidered with eyes and ears, which represent that word spreads of

her power, a serpent which represents her knowledge of heavenly matters, and English wildflowers, which represent the restoration of an eternal spring in Elizabeth’s golden age. Her

<sup>73</sup> Norris, Herbert. *Tudor Costume and Fashion* (Dover Publications New York:1997) 485.

<sup>74</sup> A.H. de Maisse, *Journal*, trans. G.B. Harrison and R.A. Jones (London, 1931) 83.

<sup>75</sup> Nichols, John. *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* Volume III (J.B. Nichols: London, 1823) 2-3. Accessed online: <http://archive.org/stream/progressespublic03nichuoft#page/n7/mode/2up>

crown also contains a crescent-moon jewel which is another reference to the moon goddess, Diana.<sup>76</sup> The detailed symbolism of Elizabeth's lavish dress was used as an appendage of her vision which she strove to create. Seeking to overwhelm those around her with her sheer magnificence and grand presence, "she walked in a manner marvelous haughty."<sup>77</sup> For such a woman, her dress could only be expected to be as grand as herself.

Elizabeth tirelessly pursued her well-dressed role, disliking being seen out of it. In the infamous bedchamber debacle with the Earl of Essex, Elizabeth was humiliated and infuriated to be seen out of dress, not playing her grand role. On one occasion with Ambassador DeMaise, "She excused herself because I found her attired in her nightgown, and began to rebuke those of her Council who were present, saying, "What will these gentlemen say"- speaking of those who accompanied me- "to see me so attired? I am much disturbed that they should see me in this state."<sup>78</sup>

For the courtiers around her, these roles and representations needed to be followed as closely as Elizabeth herself kept to them. She clearly monitored the clothing of others very closely as she established a code of law in regards to wardrobe. In a Sumptuary Statute issued on June 15, 1574, it was stated that "None shall wear in his apparel: Any silk of the color purple, cloth of gold tissue [tissue], nor fur of sables, but only the King, Queen, King's mother, children, brethren."<sup>79</sup> The statute outlines what clothing was permissible based on one's social status and reserved many fabrics and clothing items for solely the nobility.

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<sup>76</sup> Graziani, Rene. *The Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I and Its Religious Symbolism*. Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, vol. 35, (1972) 248. Accessed online: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/750931>

<sup>77</sup> A.H. de Maise, *Journal*, trans. G.B. Harrison and R.A. Jones (London, 1931) 83.

<sup>78</sup> A.H. de Maise, *Journal*, trans. G.B. Harrison and R.A. Jones (London, 1931) 24.

<sup>79</sup> *Statute issued at Greenwich in June, 1574* Accessed online: <http://elizabethan.org/sumptuary/index.html>

In Elizabethan England, image reigned supreme and a courtier's dress reflected their status, resulting in ornate and sensuous designs to prove wealth. The men and women in Elizabeth's court closely followed the dress guidelines set for them in the Sumptuary Laws. Courtiers sought clothing that matched their rank as well as bested others. To do so they utilized fashions that were "farre-fetched and deare bought,"<sup>80</sup> borrowing trends from exotic foreign courts such as the French and Italian to amaze the senses. As dress was so important to Elizabeth, strict adherence to these laws was necessary to remain in favor. Inventory of one of Sir Walter Raleigh's outfits in 1588 provides an example of this dress code. He was attired in a "white silk doublet... large silver buttons... Over one shoulder is hung the cloak in the modish manner: it is of black velvet lined and turned back with sable, with sun-rays worked in seed pearls or silver and ending with three large pearls."<sup>81</sup>

Given the sumptuary guidelines, courtiers dressed competitively, striving to best one another in impressing Elizabeth with their outfits. In the latter years of Elizabeth's reign, a bitter factional split had formed in part developed by Elizabeth herself. The enemies were Sir Walter Raleigh and the Earl of Essex. The two men were pit in a constant battle over the status as Elizabeth's undisputed favorite- a battle that Elizabeth encouraged, and a battle that ultimately found expression in a struggle of wardrobe. She would interchangeably promote one man and put down the other to constantly breed jealousy between the two. One cannot look at this rivalry and ignore the power that Elizabeth exerted over her relationship with these men, keeping them under her control by preventing total power of one. It is clear that Elizabeth was in control of these relationships and of the men around her. Essex and Raleigh fractured the court society with their bitter hatred of one another. Essex disparaged Raleigh for coming from a family of less

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<sup>80</sup> Ashelford, Jane. *Dress in the Age of Elizabeth* (B.T. Batsford Ltd. London: 1988) 44.

<sup>81</sup> Norris, Herbert. *Tudor Costume and Fashion* (Dover Publications New York:1997) 487.

prestige than he, condescendingly remarking, “I know what he has been and what he is.”

<sup>82</sup>Raleigh spoke of this rivalry himself, stating that “Twelve years entire I wasted on this war.”

<sup>83</sup>The men found issue with each other at nearly every turn and sought to turn it into a competition. Raleigh and Essex were both soldiers and became involved in a dispute over a joint mission to Cadiz, Spain. Raleigh had seized an island pre-emptively without the aid of Essex and thus became the recipient of all the victory glory. This battle raged on in a war of wardrobe. As historian Susan Bridgen details, in 1588, Raleigh commissioned a portrait of himself garbed in the Queen’s colors: black symbolizing constancy and white symbolizing purity. He wears for an



Figure 3



Figure 4

earring Elizabeth’s famed favorite jewel, the pearl. Moreover, the painting was inscribed with his motto *Amor et virtute* (Love and Virtue) crowned by a crescent moon.<sup>84</sup> The crescent moon represents the virgin moon goddess Cynthia, one of Elizabeth’s representations that

Raleigh had previously paid tribute to through poetry. Not to be outdone, Essex commissioned a portrait of himself in 1588, wearing black and white as well, leaning against a tree to symbolize constancy. This tree was swathed in vines that teemed with Elizabeth’s flower, eglantine. In a move characteristic of the bold and reckless Essex, the motto *Dat poenas laudata fides* (My praised faith causes my suffering) was painted on. This motto was bold in that it affiliated him

<sup>82</sup> Bridgen, Susan. *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (Viking:New York, 2000) 313.

<sup>83</sup> Bridgen, Susan. *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (Viking:New York, 2000) 313.

<sup>84</sup> Bridgen, Susan. *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (Viking:New York, 2000) Pg. 313.

with general Pompey of Roman times, a powerful message.<sup>85</sup> Elizabeth was not known for sharing her status with any other human being and she jealously guarded this all- powerful position.

During the New Year's celebrations of 1587, the Earl of Essex gifted Elizabeth a piece of jewelry, which is a masterful example of manipulation of wardrobe. The jewel in question displayed a rainbow crowning two pillars, one cracked. The rainbow is an overt symbol (non sine sol iris) of Elizabeth while the cracked pillar is thought to have symbolized the deceased knight Sir Philip Sidney. Essex asserted that he was the standing pillar, the new support for Elizabeth, the military hero who would fill the previous grand knight Sidney's shoes.

The transition from the more rugged throne of Scotland to the lavish pageantry on the throne of England was dramatic for James I. He himself described the change as, "like a poor man wandering about forty years in a wilderness and barren soil, and now arrived at the land of promise." Upon accession to the English throne in 1603, he commenced a reckless spending spree to provide a comfortable setting for him and his family. As a result of his desire to improve his royal wardrobe, what began as charges of 10,000 pounds in 1603 increased to 36,000 in 1610.<sup>86</sup> In a warrant to the Great Wardrobe for the Princess Elizabeth's wedding, an exhaustive list of clothing items for her trousseau are detailed including eighteen plumes of feathers, several hand painted fitting stools, and hundreds of yards of velvet, silk, lace, etc.<sup>87</sup> Aesthetics and wealth were important to the king and this was reflected in his clothing. In 1604, in direct

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<sup>85</sup> Brigden, Susan. *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (Viking:New York, 2000) Pg. 313.

<sup>86</sup> Trueman, Chris. *James I And Royal Revenue* Accessed online: <http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/James-I-and-Royal-Revenue.htm>

<sup>87</sup> Stuart, James. *Warrant of King James I to the Great Wardrobe For Apparel For The Marriage of The Princess Elizabeth* (Fredrick Madden, 1835) Accessed Online: <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=UrhPAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA3>



contradiction of Elizabeth's sumptuary laws, a law was passed that banned the regulation of clothing. This law should not be taken as a sign that clothing was not important in Jacobean England. On the contrary, its discussion within the legal systems of England indicates that it was a very important topic of the time and that James wanted no restrictions on what creative approaches to wardrobe that courtiers might consider.<sup>88</sup>

Clothing in Jacobean England, as in Elizabethan England, was a representation of status and wealth. Courtiers maintained an extensive wardrobe and invested a lot of time and money into devising new outfits for occasions. The quantity and type of fabric, style incorporated, and usefulness were all considered. Much as with paintings, every aspect of an outfit was chosen and worn by design. Wardrobe was a result of very deliberate and careful planning. Clothing was engineered to catch attention in moments when a large audience would be watching a courtier. Frequently in Jacobean England, this took place at masques and dance performances.

For example, with the development of theatre into the dramatic masques of Jacobean England, huge sums of money were contributed to costume design to depict a scene. Queen Anne herself among many courtiers performed in these masques and donned the elaborate stage costumes. *The Masque of Blackness*, performed in 1605, had Queen Anne and her ladies riding in a large seashell and clothed in diaphanous fabrics of silver and azure while feathers and pearls adorned their hair. Men accompanied them who had their hair dyed blue.<sup>89</sup> The stage was also layered in billowing fabric to simulate ocean waves. The investment in the masque was a staggering 3,000 pounds. Such a vast sum indicated the importance of presentation and detail in the court of James.

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<sup>88</sup> Vincent, Susan. *Dressing the Elite* (Berg United Kingdom: 2003) 119.

<sup>89</sup> Leapman, Michael. *Inigo: The Troubled Life of Inigo Jones, Architect of the English Renaissance*. (London, Headline Book Publishing: 2003) 73-77.

Wardrobe in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, where image was an all-important concept, was an immense status symbol. While it may not have directly promoted courtiers, it was always present in a courtier's attempt to create the perfect vision, and it was certainly considered very important by the monarchs. Its frequent appearance in legislative matters and the sheer breadth of cost and inventory for personal wardrobe collections and holiday gifts is indicative of its significance. These royal courts mirrored the ideals of the Renaissance that emphasized the importance of wardrobe. Without wardrobe, a courtier's image could not be complete and their artistic and educated façade would be damaged.

## *~ Conclusion ~*

The courts of Elizabeth and James provided a stunning backdrop for incredibly complex relationships that developed between emulous courtiers and their monarch. There were multiple aspects to these relationships, which included the political or military genius to benefit the reigning monarch as well as a thorough knowledge of the courtly arts to execute a powerful and dazzling image, intimidating competitors. Time and again, certain courtiers were able to master the renaissance arts to outshine their rivals and catch the king or queen's eye. The arts were powerful weapons in a courtier's arsenal of court politics to aid them in performing an intricate dance with their sovereign. These dances consisted of several varying nuances from staving off dangerous competition to consistently enthralling their powerful partner with sage advice and emotional diversion while contending with their tempestuous emotions. Much could be gained from being court favorite, but much could be lost in the face of failure or disfavor.

The courts of Elizabeth and James are not unique in maintaining a competitive court atmosphere. All European courts of the early modern era hosted courtiers who were clamoring for power, money, and fame. The rigid structure of culture and power that Louis XIV (1643-1718) instilled at Versailles created a very aggressive court where rivals vied viciously. In his courts, as with many European courts, a courtier's social status determined his personal income and wealth. In this type of court society, courtiers constantly attended the events at Versailles, clamoring for positions near the monarch during his daily toilet as well as meals, daily Mass, balls, gambling parties, and theatrical and musical performances. In Louis XIV's complex social structure, only the highest ranking nobles and courtiers were given the privilege of watching him dress and dine. Louis established his court at Versailles away from the city life in Paris where he could maintain a tighter hold on the affairs and interactions of his courtiers. To be absent from court and away from the sovereign's daily functions meant that a courtier was extremely disadvantaged. Female courtiers too, in particular courtesans, rose to power in the French courts. Louis XIV's famed mistress Madame de Montespan exercised a lot of influence as his favorite up until her scandalous sorcery trial. Diane de Poitiers was the famed mistress of King Henri II (1519-1559) who served as his political confidant, even writing some of his letters for him. She grew to be so powerful that she was nearly the equal of Henri's wife, Catherine de' Medici. The social hierarchy created for a ruler's wife and mistresses alone was a very complex system. This detailed social hierarchy and its etiquette created an obsessive scramble for power amongst courtiers in France.<sup>90</sup>

Neither is Elizabeth unique in being a reigning single woman on the throne, using men around her. Catherine the Great ruled Russia from 1762-1796 and maintained a lengthy list of

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<sup>90</sup> Elias, Norbert. *The Court Society* (T.J. Press Ltd. Great Britain: 1983) pg. 80-87

lovers whom she entertained over the years. These various relationships ranged from passionate and deeply involved, spanning decades, to short-term affairs. The men with whom Catherine became romantically involved often received massive financial and land gains, and often held strong political influence over Catherine. Similar to Elizabeth and Leicester, Catherine was deeply involved with Grigory Potemkin for decades. She was devastated at his death and carried his letters on her person for the remainder of her life.<sup>91</sup> An excerpt from a letter she wrote to him on March 1, 1774, reads “My precious dear, I love you extraordinarily; you’re nice, and clever, and merry and amusing, and I don’t need the rest of the world when I’m sitting with you.” The letter- one of many- illustrates the fervent love expressed in this relationship, not unlike Elizabeth.<sup>92</sup> The same romantically intense relationships that James I and Elizabeth I experienced took place in other regions and time periods such as with Catherine I, Empress of Imperial Russia.

What is different [distinct] in the English case examined here is the expression of the relationships between Elizabeth I and James I with their courtiers and how they culminated in a unique cultural golden age. The extensive ties between the courtly arts and the courtier’s gambit created an extremely unique court atmosphere. The behavior and communication that took place in these relationships between James and Elizabeth and their courtiers reveals a striking human vulnerability in these immensely powerful leaders. It is because of the romantic nuance of these relationships that the court society was entirely transformed and structured on the monarch’s gender and sexuality. It is because Elizabeth was an unmarried woman and because James was most likely a homosexual man that men utterly dominated the court scene and that women were

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<sup>91</sup> Smith, Douglas (editor). *Love and Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin* (Northern Illinois University Press, Illinois: 2004) pg. xiii-xv [Emphasis in original quote]

<sup>92</sup> Smith, Douglas (editor). *Love and Conquest* (Northern Illinois University Press, Illinois: 2004) pg. 21-22

not able to attain huge power during these reigns. It is precisely Elizabeth's unmarried status that contributed to her anger and jealousy over unapproved courtier marriages to beautiful women and also entirely the reason that the cult of Elizabeth was able to flourish.

Elizabethan and Jacobean England were courts where magnificent pageantry, intrigue, and performance bred power and influence. Without masterful performance of the arts, many of the most famous powerful and dynamic courtiers of the time would not have risen to the great positions that they held and exercised such great influence. The arts and politics of court culture were irrevocably intertwined in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, creating a complex dance of power, the dance of the courtier.

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